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## **Fused**

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May, 2011

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### **Artist Statement**

I use encaustic, wire, and oil paint on wooden boxes and panels. I am interested in the process of layering media. These forms evolve as previous marks are concealed, added to, and concealed again while intuitively creating forms. With this body of work I explore confinement and freedom. Therefore, some of the shapes and forms seem contained while others appear to break away from their boundaries.

# **Fused**

## **Introduction**

As a freshman in college I was encouraged to explore various materials and approaches in art. After weighing my options, I found myself in the Communication Arts and Design program with a focus in illustration. The classes were set up with assignments that my peers and I would complete. Sometimes, there would be flexibility in the type of media to use and subject matter, as long as they both fit within the established guidelines. What partly drew me to this program was its formal structure but towards the end I longed for artistic freedom. At first, I was a aimless eighteen-year-old and I needed specific direction. By the time I was twenty-two years old I wanted to take my art in the direction I saw fit and realized that illustration would not provide the independence I was looking for.

After graduation I struggled with artist block. I needed to create art but felt at a loss as to what to fabricate. Another struggle I faced stemmed from working full-time. A forty-plus hour work week monopolized my energy, leaving little of myself for creating art. I needed to reclaim control by practicing my artistic discipline. The graduate painting classes of the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) presented a suitable framework. It was what I needed in order to return to the creative cycle along with the freedom to grow as an artist.

Through the program, the classes helped me to return to the habit of creating work on a regular basis. They motivated me to examine, create, and contemplate my work. The experience

mirrored the studio classes from my freshman year. In these MIS-IAR classes I found myself growing as an artist through experimentation and development.

## **Aesthetics**

While in college I fell in love with the human form. My interest and affection began with the figure drawing classes. The figure seduced me, and I was obsessed with capturing its essence. I found myself more focused on this particular subject than I had been with any prior artwork. Because figure drawing became my work, not something which I pursued merely as a class assignment, I continued to enroll in figure drawing classes when the opportunity presented itself. Under both faculty and self-direction, I grew in my understanding and rendering of the figure. Unfortunately, projects assigned in the Illustration program prevented me from continuing my exploration and fascination with the figure.

In my first pieces of art created for the MIS-IAR program, I naturally returned to the human figure. My pieces were two-fold, the figure was captured realistically, and placed in a composition surrounded by colorful geometric forms and layered textures. During this time, I was pleased with the end result (the union of figures with geometry) but I soon felt discontent with my work. I wanted to move away from how I was manufacturing my art towards a much freer approach. The spontaneity I sought was not possible with a piece I had so fully planned in my mind and in sketches beforehand. Therefore, instead of painting from a blueprint of preliminary work I subsequently let my disposition and intuition guide me. Immediately, the work began to evolve as I allowed myself to let go of preconceptions. My drawings became less constrained and more flexible. While before I had representational renderings of the figure, I now

started to depend more on simple stylized shapes. With this new approach I felt more connected with my work and I began to reveal more of myself. The result promoted more artistry, more originality in my work, and my creativity was unleashed. I was learning from the process of working. My art experience became more captivating for me and I was learning how to examine my work with a more objective eye.

## **Influences**

My art is inspired by all my experiences. Whether conventional or exceptional, every personal experience and interaction touches me in some way. Whether it is with people, nature, machinery, or architecture, something inside of me is sparked and enlivened. In addition to day-to-day interactions, my creativity is also stimulated by my constant exposure to the arts. There are two local artists who specifically have served as major inspirations in my work during the MIS-IAR program. They are Cindy Neuschwander and Pam Anderson. These two artists have influenced the materials I use and techniques I apply. Over time, my work has assumed new dimensions and taken me in different directions because of the initial contact and follow-up study of these two local women.

My first exposure to Cindy Neuschwander was in a solo show of her work. While viewing her work I was instantly seduced by encaustic. Immediately, I became interested in the layering of her pieces. What struck me was the variety of marks in the numerous layers and depth within individual pieces. I was drawn to her limited color palette, the range of textures, and the numerous layers involved. Within a month of viewing her show, I had purchased the materials needed to work with encaustics. I was at a loss as to how to start and needed to do the

necessary research before beginning. Fortunately, I was able to visit Neuschwander's studio where I watched her work. During that visit she discussed her process. I saw her work with wax, adjust her hot plate, and keep her wax soft enough to manipulate. Since that important visit, I have adopted her setup and made it my own. Learning first hand has always been important to me, and seeing her encaustic techniques led me to begin my own exploration of this medium. It was not until I started the MIS-IAR program that I summoned the courage to dive into encaustic and paint my first piece.

Another artist who inspires me is the artist Pam Anderson. Her works are comprised of paper collages. They are composed of different colored sheets of paper, magazine cutouts, drawings, and thread. I appreciated the delicateness of the paper used, but what really caught my attention was her stitched line. There was thread throughout the works, real stitching and sewing. This was something so different from what one normally associates with a piece of art on paper. I really enjoyed the elegant line quality the stitched thread created by being pushed and pulled through the paper. The individual elements of her collage pieces were joined together by thread, made organic, and unified by that stitching. There were so many different ways she incorporated the stitching into her surfaces, such as using the thread to join numerous pieces of paper together and to create marks on the paper surface. Immediately, I began imagining how I would incorporate the stitched line in the surfaces of my work.

I was excited by both artists. Their influence has been strong in my work. Each has brought me to new materials, new techniques, and most importantly a new way of looking at my own work and at myself. My art has taken me in directions I had not imagined prior to my exposure to these two artists.



## **Progression and Mixed Media**

My first coursework in the MIS-IAR program focused on painting. The paintings I made at this time had an enormous impact on my subsequent work. This first painting, *Three Red Dots and Then Some* (Appendix, 1), is an oil painting on canvas. Here, I decided to merge figuration with abstraction. The image presented is of a woman seated on a chair with her back facing the viewer. The figure is depicted naturalistically, while the chair gradually morphs into the brownish-red of the ground. The figure's surroundings consist of geometric shapes that I developed with thick layers of oil paint. The layered oil paint conceals some of the geometric shapes while exposing others. This thick layering and tactile surface became a characteristic feature of my work.

Another pictorial element in this piece consisted of six red dots which progress vertically from large to small on the left-hand side of the composition. I placed these red dots here as a suggestion of a second figurative element. Thus, the work is balanced by a figure on the right and an abstracted form on the left. I continued to explore this mixture of figuration and abstraction.

After focusing on painting I ventured into bookmaking. At first, I used the thread for bookbinding only, sewing was simply a functional part of the work. Then, inspired by Pam Anderson's thread work, I started to stitch within the pages themselves. Sewing, the process of penetrating and exiting the pages, began to fascinate me. I was adding something to each book's empty pages. The sewing was no longer mechanical or purely functional. It had become a process loosened from its original intent. The sewing became more important than the making of books.

From this bookmaking experience, I decided to incorporate the stitched line into my painting. In *Dreaming* (Appendix, 2) I continued to use the human figure but depicted each figure by stitching contour lines directly on the canvas. After stitching the figures I continued to add media to my process. For this piece I used beeswax, another new material for me. First, I applied pure melted beeswax over the surface and rubbed a little oil paint into the wax surface. This created a color with subtle texture and shade changes. With the delicate application of both materials, the painting seemed to be illuminated.

I wanted to continue to use the stitch line and wax but I also wanted to present a more subtle version of the figure. For the next piece, *Skin Like* (Appendix, 3), there is part of a figure visible. It is suggested rather than being presented in its entirety. The torso is prominent but no head or legs are depicted. There is stitching which suggests crossed arms. I decided to experiment with wax on a wooden surface, as opposed to canvas, but somehow still incorporate stitching. In order to use thread, I had to drill holes into the wood and then stitch the thread through the openings. The wood panel I constructed had sides that measured 3” deep. This depth allowed my stitched line to continue to be a compositional feature as it wrapped around the edge. Next, the wax was applied over the entire surface. I fused the wax with an iron and wax paper, leaving a slightly textured surface. Finally, oil paint was rubbed into the wax to create subtle hues. The colors, as well as surface textures in *Skin Like*, suggest the appearance of human skin.

My mixed media process evolved with *Reaching* (Appendix, 4). I was interested in the idea of the imagery wrapping around the edges of paintings. I decided to extend those edges by creating a cubic support, allowing me to paint on five surfaces. I purposefully created small boxes to establish a sense of intimacy between the piece and the viewer. Instead of using thread

I started to use thin jewelry wire which allowed me to have more control. At times the wire would lay flush against the wood, like thread, and other times I kept it raised above the surface. This wire feature added an extra dimension to the work by presenting contrasting materials and textures to the piece.

At this juncture, my process also began moving in different directions. I started to melt oil paint with the wax and paint the pigmented wax onto the wood surface. I would gouge into the surface, filling the spaces with oil paint. I kept my palette limited to two hues, red and yellow ochre, and adjusted the tones of those hues. I used the yellow ochre beeswax to resemble skin and the red to hint at the color of human hair. These colors in combination with the various media contributed to a sense of humanity to my work.

### **Working in Series**

Many of my paintings are developed in a series to allow for a visual continuum from one painting to the next, as well as the contiguous comparison. Just as the viewer recognizes patterns and materials, I too can learn from a cohesive series of work both during and after the process of creation. As I work through a series, I constantly evaluate the pieces and progress with slight alterations. Each piece represents a stage in my creative evolution, a step away from representational figures to a freer and more process-oriented style.

In the following set of pieces, *Untitled* (Appendix, 5) and *Breaking Free* (Appendix, 6), I employed simplified shapes and lines but no longer focused on the figure. I started working with larger boxes and panels for space to further explore my application of media. I continued to thread wire through pre-drilled holes but the wire I used now was a larger, heavier gauge. I stitched the wire to create organic shapes that I wrapped around the sides. The contours of the

wire seemed curved, alive, somehow more animated when manipulated. I also experimented more with the application of wax, encouraging textured surfaces. I continued to gouge into the surface but contrasted and balanced this by including built-up areas within the piece. My gouged lines and the built-up areas became more intuitive, as if now these were my drawing tools. There is a clear difference among surface areas in these pieces. Some are more heavily built up, while others exist on a lower plane with the wax closer to the surface of the wood.

In the piece *Intimate Moment* (Appendix, 7) I continued to work with a heavy gauged wire but started to paint the wire with oil paint. This technique created the feeling that the wire was a continuation of the painted shapes found within the composition. Varied materials were merging in the pieces, just as my ideas were merging. The wire and the individual shapes within the boxes were becoming more organic as my pieces became more process-oriented. I also expanded my palette and added more color. I still used a limited color palette but the selective colors I used were more vibrant than before. I also continued to incorporate raised areas on the surface which related more closely with the wire shapes.

I wanted to continue challenging myself and decided to work larger and with even more color. I also wanted to continue using wax but apply it in such a manner so that it did not seem wax-like. In *Big Blue* (Appendix, 8) I used a predominantly monochromatic palette of blue with a touch of orange. In this piece, the figure emerged but in a less recognizable form. It is organic yet amorphous. I also veered away from the box shape, wanting to focus more on a single rectangular surface.

The composition contains a large organic blue shape that is largest towards the upper right center. The pigment has a higher oil paint to wax ratio that allows the colors to be more vibrant and it hides some of the obvious waxy tell-tale signs of an encaustic piece, adding to its

visual complexity. With the addition of more and more paint, and less wax, the golden beeswax has become less associated with skin. The paint mixture has gained autonomy and is more vibrant than before.

I then started to feel that the stitched wire appeared to be superficial as opposed to being integrated within the piece. I was curious to see how the pieces would work without the wire. In *...you love me* (Appendix, 9), I started with charcoal outlines of a selected organic shape. I then started to add gesso and acrylic paint to the charcoal outlines. I continued drawing the shape in charcoal, gesso, and acrylic paint numerous times before adding oil and wax. I wanted to create richer surfaces that contained more illusionistic depth. This piece is constructed on a wooden panel without stitched wire and I have incorporated more varied media and a larger and more diverse, colorful palette. This piece is indicative of my next step in the evolution of my process and my work. Where I am headed I don't know but the materials and process continue to lead me. The works take control and teach me, and this experience has become more liberating with each new piece.

## **Conclusion**

After completing undergraduate school, I wanted to continue to create art but became frustrated with my lack of productivity. I wanted to create but felt at a loss as to where to start and what to do, I now create art regularly. This personal metamorphosis is due to the comprehensive instruction and confidence I have accrued by studying different media, styles, and techniques taught by influential instructors. I have found a direction that I can continue to examine, improve, and modify. Being an

artist is a continuance of investigating and discovering new things, and my education in the MIS-IAR program at VCU has prepared me to continue on my pilgrimage.

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## Appendix

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Figure 1. *Three Red Dots and Then Some*, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2006.

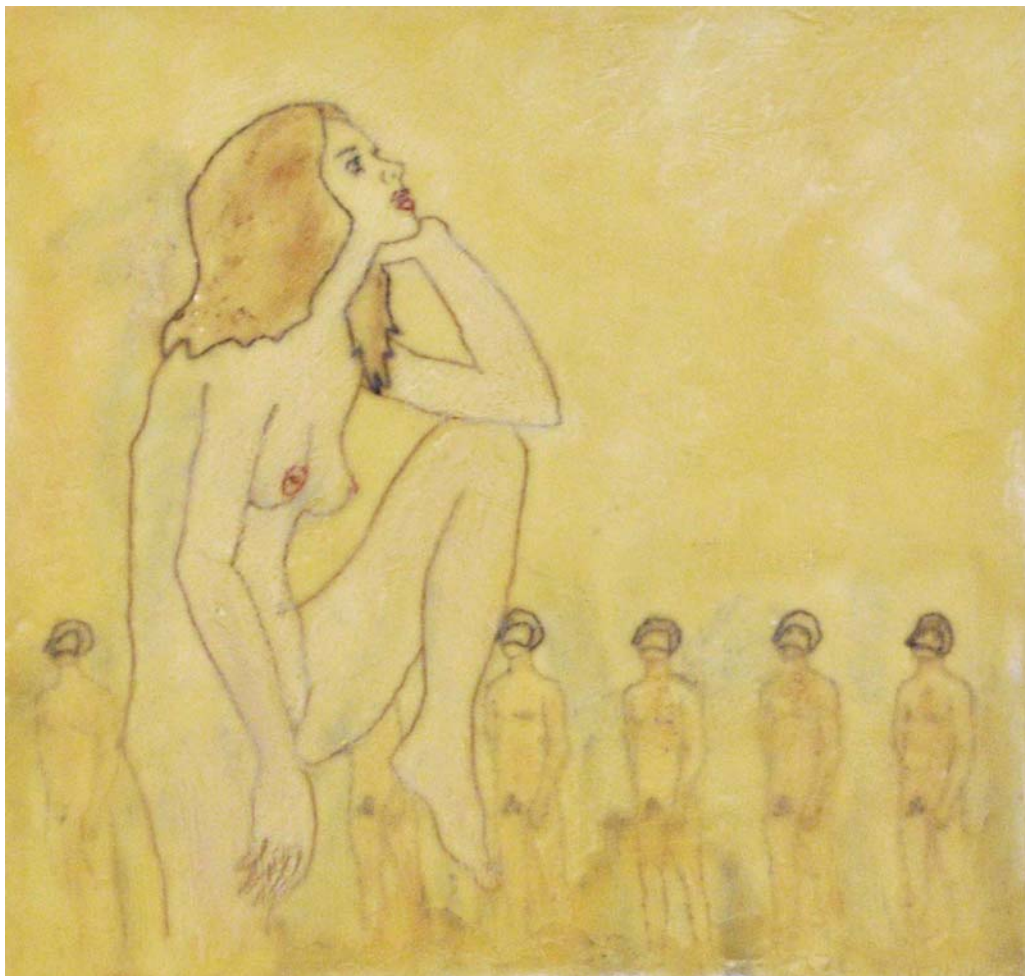


Figure 2. *Dreaming*, stitched thread, wax, and oil on canvas, 12" x 12", 2007.



Figure 3. *Skin Like*, stitched thread, wax, and oil on panel, 11" x 11" x 4.5", 2007.



Figure 4. *Reaching*, stitched wire and encaustic on panel, 4.5" x 4.5" x 4.5", 2008.





Figure 5. *Untitled*, stitched wire and encaustic on panel, 8.5" x 8.5" x 8.5", 2009.



Figure 6. *Breaking Free*, stitched wire and encaustic on panel, 24" x 24", 2009.



Figure 7. *Intimate Moment*, stitched wire and encaustic on panel, 3" x 3" x 3", 2009.



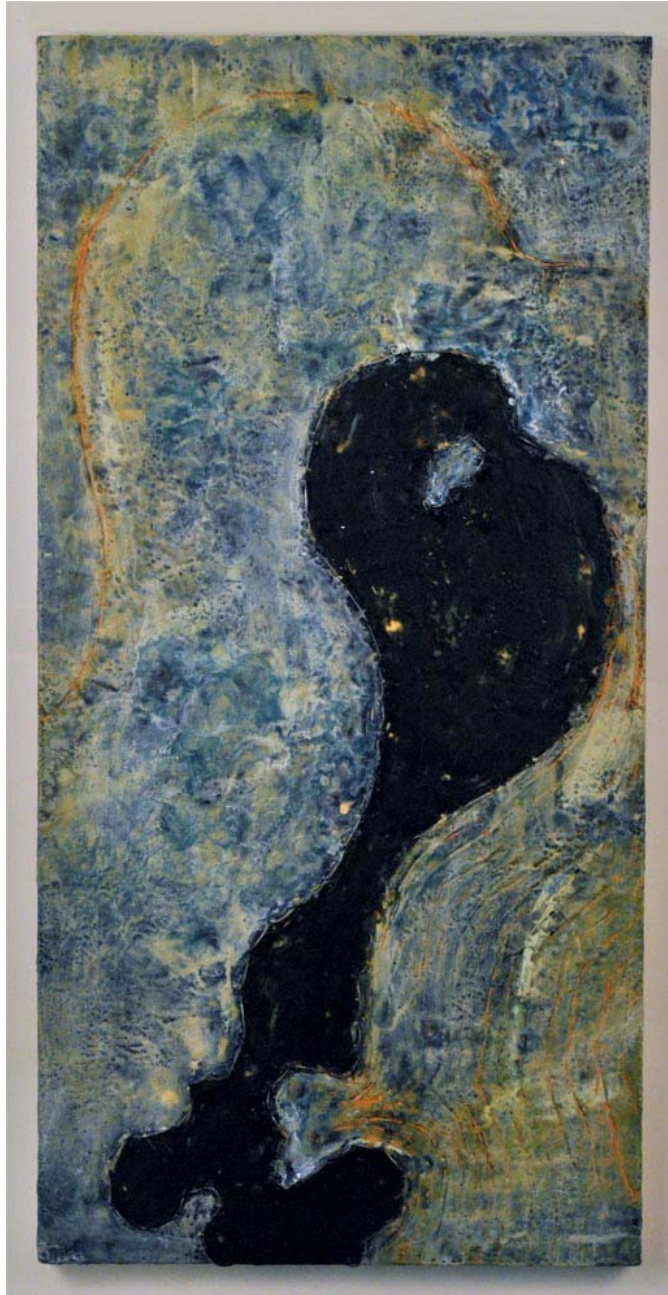


Figure 8. *Big Blue*, stitched wire and encaustic on panel, 36" x 24", 2009.





Figure 9.      *...you love me*, gesso, charcoal, acrylic, oil and wax on panel, 12" x 12", 2010.

**Lauren J. Cifranic**

**Education:**

- 2011 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA Specialization in Painting and Mixed Media
- 2003 Bachelor of Fine Arts in Communication Arts and Design, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA Specialization in Illustration

**Other Education:**

- 2005 Teacher Licensure Program, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA

**Teaching Experience:**

- 2005-Present International Baccalaureate and Advance Placement Art Instructor, Thomas Jefferson High School, Richmond Public Schools, Richmond, VA

**Related Experience:**

- 2003-2004 Graphic Designer, Dominion Sign Company, Richmond, VA

**Professional Association Memberships:**

- 2005-Present National Education Association
- 2005-Present Virginia Education Association
- 2005-Present National Art Education Association

**Exhibitions:**

- 2011 *Fused*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, artspace, Richmond, VA
- 2010 *Virginia Artists 2010 Exhibition*, The Charles H. Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA
- 2009 *ThinkSmall5: The Fifth Biennial International Miniature Invitational Exhibition*, art6 Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2009 *Women and the Arts*, art6 Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2009 *MIS 605 Group Painting Exhibit*, Plant Zero Project Space, Richmond, VA, Curated by Sally Bowring
- 2009 *Virginia Artists 2009 Exhibition*, The Charles H. Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA
- 2009 *Art Educator Show*, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Richmond, VA
- 2008 *Mixed Media Show*, art6, Richmond, VA
- 2008 *All Media Show*, Artworks Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2007 *In Design*, EQ3, Richmond, VA
- 2007 *Ideas Expressed*, 1212 Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2007 *The Human Form*, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, VA
- 2007 *The Big Art Show*, Gallery 5, Richmond, VA
- 2007 *Group Exhibition*, Gallery West, Alexandria, VA
- 2004 *REPRESSED*, 17.5 Ethos Cafe, Richmond, VA

**Exhibitions: (continued)**

- 2004        *Group Exhibition*, Gallery West, Alexandria, VA  
2003        *Undergraduate Student Exhibition*, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA

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- 2010        Honorable Mention, The Charles H. Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA  
2009        Award of Distinction for Mixed Media, The Charles H. Taylor Arts Center,  
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